

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 30, 2021

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair  
Senator Robert Myers, Vice Chair  
Senator David Wilson  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Lyman Hoffman

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 72

"An Act relating to civics education, civics examinations, and secondary school graduation requirements; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 17

"An Act relating to the retrofitting of certain public facilities and community facilities; relating to the performance of energy audits on schools and community facilities; relating to the duties of the Alaska Energy Authority and the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation; creating a rapid economic recovery office in the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority; and relating to the state energy policy and energy source reporting by state agencies."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 72

SHORT TITLE: SEC. SCHOOL CIVICS EDUCATION

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

02/05/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/05/21	(S)	EDC, CRA

03/10/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/10/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/10/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/19/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/19/21	(S)	-- Invited & Public Testimony --
03/22/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/22/21	(S)	Scheduled but Not Heard
03/24/21	(S)	EDC RPT CS 5DP NEW TITLE
03/24/21	(S)	DP: HOLLAND, HUGHES, STEVENS, MICCICHE, BEGICH
03/24/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/24/21	(S)	Moved CSSB 72(EDC) Out of Committee
03/24/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/30/21	(S)	CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**BILL: SB 17**

SHORT TITLE: ENERGY EFFICIENCY & POLICY: PUB. BLDGS  
 SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) BEGICH

01/22/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/22/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/21	(S)	CRA, L&C, FIN
02/25/21	(S)	CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/25/21	(S)	Heard & Held
02/25/21	(S)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/30/21	(S)	CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR GARY STEVENS  
 Alaska State Legislature  
 Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 72.

TIM LAMKIN, Staff  
 Senator Gary Stevens  
 Alaska State Legislature  
 Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided an overview of SB 72.

DR. MICHAEL JOHNSON, Commissioner  
 Alaska Department of Education  
 Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 72.

LA QUEN NÁAY LIZ MEDICINE CROW, President and CEO

First Alaskans Institute  
Kake, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 72.

JENNIFER KNUTSON, Senior Director of Teaching and Learning  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 72.

SENATOR TOM BEGICH  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 17.

CONNOR OWENS, Intern  
Senator Begich  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Reviewed the committee substitute for SB 17 on behalf of the sponsor.

CHRISTOPHER HODGIN, Engineer and Architect  
Division of Facility Services  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions regarding SB 17.

## **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:24 PM](#)

**CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES** called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Myers, and Chair Hughes. Senator Wilson arrived during the course of the meeting.

3:31:04 to 3:31:24

At ease

## **SB 72-SEC. SCHOOL CIVICS EDUCATION**

[3:32:28 PM](#)

**CHAIR HUGHES** announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 72 "An Act relating to civics education, civics examinations, and secondary school graduation requirements; and providing for an effective date."

[CSSB 72(EDC) was before the committee.]

3:32:39 PM

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 72, said the bill is important to him because he realizes when free public education started in the United States, one of the reasons for education was to develop a citizenry so that people going into schools would become citizens, learn what it means to become a citizen in this country, and to participate in voting—a means of being a citizen—certainly, what everyone is doing in the capitol.

He explained the bill is a recognition that there has been a lot of apathy in the vision in this country. A lot of focus—rightly so in many ways—is on mass science sort of at the expense of the liberal arts in terms of history, politics, and law. Other states have been looking into [civics education], so Alaska is not the only one.

SENATOR STEVENS said developing a curriculum with exams in civics is important. The curriculum should include things like flag etiquette and all those sorts of things to make sure that people are more involved in the government, register to vote, and they take leadership positions like committee members are doing.

He explained that SB 72 is one effort to restore an understanding of what it means to be an American citizen among our youngest generations and to teach them about what it means to be in the system of government that the country has. He said to reverse the noted [civics apathy] trend, he thinks the bill importantly makes an investment in the future of our country as well as recognizes the cultural diversity of Alaska.

He detailed the bill includes an exit exam on civics for graduating seniors, not necessarily a need to pass it in a high-stakes exam, but students are subject to take it. The bill directs the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)—who has been quite cooperative in the legislation—to develop a unique Alaskan civics and curriculum assessment. An important part of the bill is to recognize the importance of including Alaska Native tribal government system as well.

3:35:07 PM

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, explained the bill before the committee had quite an evolution. There have been a number of task forces over the years that have come forward with a variety

of recommendations, one of them consistently being to review and update the State's standards and even to develop curriculum for the state, and that is what SB 72 reflects.

MR. LAMKIN said version I that came out of the Education Committee steps away from the high-stakes naturalization test administered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and instead embraces the idea of the state developing an assessment that would be administered through DEED.

He noted another important component of SB 72 would recognize to include not only traditional American and state government studies, but very importantly, Alaskan Native tribal government systems--invited testifiers are available to specifically address that.

CHAIR HUGHES asked for the sectional analysis for SB 72.

[3:36:37 PM](#)

MR. LAMKIN paraphrased the following sectional analysis for SB 72:

Section 1

AS 14.03.076 relates to public schools, adding a new section directing the State Board of Education and Early Development to develop the curriculum and a related assessment aligned with our state standards regarding government and citizenship to include U.S. federal government, Alaska state government, and Alaska Tribal government; and that it requires students to take the assessment established there in order to receive a high school diploma. Of course, there would be some exceptions available as detailed in the bill for students with special needs, but schools are to document on student transcripts that they have taken the exam; in this case, we purposely did not include a requirement that they pass the exam per se, but that they simply take it.

Section 2

AS 14.07.168 relates to reporting requirements by State Board, and to include in their annual report a description of that civics curriculum that was developed and of the student performance on the assessment that was described.

Section 3

There is an effective date in Section 3 of July 1, 2022.

3:37:58 PM

At ease

3:38:08 PM

CHAIR HUGHES reconvened the meeting and turned to invited testimony.

3:38:37 PM

DR. MICHAEL JOHNSON, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Education, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of SB 72. He thanked Senator Stevens, saying he has not waived for years in making sure public education in Alaska is built upon the purpose of civics education. He added everyone can regret that more policymakers in the country have not shared Senator Stevens' efforts.

He said civics education is not a new innovation, it is timeless wisdom that the country has somehow forgotten. He noted Plato said the following:

Schools should create good men and women who act nobly. If we have an education system that does less than that, all our other efforts for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be thwarted.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON referenced a study from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation as follows:

- Only 36 percent of Americans passed a multiple-choice U.S. citizens test
- Less than 25 percent know why the United States fought the British
- Only 24 percent can name a single thing that Benjamin Franklin was famous for
  - 37 percent think he invented the lightbulb—he did not

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON stated the proof that Senator Stevens is right to introduce SB 72 is noted in the study as follows:

- 74 percent of people 65 and older scored the best—answering at least 6 out of 10 questions correctly
- Only 19 [percent] of those 45 and younger passed

- o That is 81 percent scoring 59 percent or lower on that particular exam

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said although he does not have specific data, he is confident that everyone would be alarmed by how few Alaskan citizens understand Alaska Native history and layers of tribal governance. The presentation in the House Tribal Affairs Committee on March 4, 2021 is a great example what Alaska specific civics education could look like via-presentation by the First Alaskans Institute.

3:41:10 PM

He stated SB 72 is not a new coat of paint on the Alaska public education system, the bill is a much-needed effort to repair the foundation. Civics education is about purpose and a public education system without clear purpose is more expensive, ineffective, and corrosive to the country's society. A public education system with purpose is more efficient, more effective, and improves the country's society.

He explained the legislature's purpose statement for education in AS 14.03.015 is clear. It says:

It is the policy of this state that the purpose of education is to help ensure that all students will succeed in their education and work, shape worthwhile and satisfying lives for themselves, exemplify the best values of society, and be effective in improving the character and quality of the world about them.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON said the statute is a great description of the outcome of an education purposed with civics—it is also the vision statement for the State Board of Education and Early Development (State Board). Alaska spends over 160 billion pennies each year on its public education system and every single penny should have a purpose related to civics education.

He noted during the previous several months his fear has been that the State will lower the bar and settle for less. Of course, everyone wants schools to be open, but he hopes that that is not the new benchmark for the state. Open is good, purposeful, and effective is essential, and at times more difficult.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON noted a few months after giving his going to the Moon speech, John Kennedy addressed a growing public

questioning of why the country should spend all that money to go to the moon. The President said in a speech later that year:

We choose to go to the moon in this decade and other things not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON explained going to the moon was not about improving the moon, it was about making America better. He added:

Let's not storm the capitol, let's teach kids to read. Let's inspire them to run for school board, run for mayor, and even run for the legislature. Let's show them how to work together to create good policy. Let's teach them how to value liberty and never take it for granted. Let's show them how to embrace what is difficult because it makes us better and makes us more thankful.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON concluded his comments with a quote from President Kennedy's original Go to the Moon speech:

For while we cannot guarantee that we shall one day be first, we can guarantee that any failure to make this effort will make us last.

[3:44:22 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS commented he was intrigued with the bill at first, noting constituency support. However, he felt dismayed after reviewing the committee substitute (CS) for SB 72. It took what was a straight forward, concrete proposition and turned it into something a bit more amorphous.

He noted Commissioner Johnson talked about the education and how it should connect to society values and purpose; however, some of the changes in bill lost those values and purpose. Instead of talking about an exam that simply examined the understanding of government that we expect out of people coming to our country, the legislation now has a curriculum and an assessment that includes government citizenship and a history of government systems in the United States.

SENATOR MYERS argued one of the problems the country is having these days is not just that we have not educated children on government and citizenship, but that we do not agree on what



that means anymore, what the purpose of government is, and what does it mean to be a good citizen—over the last 40 or 50 years those have changed.

SENATOR MYERS said the CS makes him hesitant to agree to teaching a set of values when he does not know what that set of values is. He asked Commissioner Johnson if DEED could provide an idea of direction that they want to go in creating that curriculum.

[3:46:46 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON replied the bill sponsor is best to answer some of his question on changes. However, the department will not be the only one creating the standards and curriculum. The State Board has laid out a process that involves stakeholders, communities, and educators in developing any kind of standards and curriculum to make sure it is representative, that there is a public process, and there is opportunity for public input and comment on anything the State Board adopts.

He added fundamental to purpose is also fact and his hope is the curriculum, and the standard includes facts and history about the United States, including the unique history of Alaska.

[3:48:08 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS commented he is not exactly sure what Senator Myers is getting at. The bill is about politics, but it is not political. He said he does not think there is any attempt to teach anyone about being a Republican or Democrat, the intent is to understand what it means to be an American citizen and the commissioner has a great grasp of that. The State is doing this really well in some places, noting there are government teachers he has met throughout Alaska who are doing a tremendous job in educating their kids and what it means to be an American citizen, what our history is all about, and the importance of voting and participating.

He noted—a little off the topic—he was a different generation, and he could not vote until he was 21. That was the requirement in Alaska and the United States, and he voted when he was in college. The ability to vote meant so much to him, he studied it, he learned about it, and he knew what was going on from high school classes.

SENATOR STEVENS stated there are some great teachers out there, he had some great teachers when he went through school who really made students proud to be an American citizen, and not

about party politics and the issues that legislators deal with, but rather the bigger picture of what it means to be a citizen.

SENATOR STEVENS said he is not sure what Senator Myers means about values, but he thinks the value of citizenship rises above all the other issues.

CHAIR HUGHES thanked Commissioner Johnson for his passionate presentation and asked that he provide his comments in writing.

3:50:35 PM

LA QUEN NÁAY LIZ MEDICINE CROW, President and CEO, First Alaskans Institute, Kake, Alaska, testified in support of SB 72. She thanked Senator Stevens and the committee for inviting the First Alaskans Institute (FAI) to share a few words about SB 72 and about the potential that FAI sees in the legislation. She stated she was happy to see the CS containing a simple sentence to include within civics education the tribal government systems as well; to that point is what she really wants to speak to.

She noted she is a product of the Alaska public education system, attending school in Kake and Juneau. When preparing for her testimony she tried to recall at any time when her schools ever mentioned anything relevant to her as a Tribal citizen. However, her connection to her Tribe is strong through her family and community, she is an enrolled citizen of the Organized Village of Kake, and her family and many community members have been involved in ensuring that their tribal government is strong and taking care of its citizens in Kake.

She said she has been able to watch and learn very much from what it means to be someone who cares about their community and who steps forward to serve and take care of the things that communities need to be addressed. However, not once did she ever have to opportunity to learn about the sovereignty, about her tribal government, what a tribal government was, how it was different from state government, how state government, federal government, and tribal governments are three sovereigns operating in present day Alaska. There was a void of understanding the critical role of tribal governments and the wellbeing of all of Alaska.

MS. MEDICINE CROW stated what she really appreciates about SB 72 is that the bill is saying, "We will no longer erase one third of that sovereignty picture that we have in Alaska, that when we talk about what it means to be a citizen." She said too often in Alaska's history the divisiveness and the racial inequities

between Alaska Native peoples and those who now call Alaska home have allowed us to blindside our own best interests in the education that our children receive.

3:54:02 PM

She noted FAI provides an Alaska Native governance and protocols training. Legislators—as elected officials—are making decisions everyday about the wellbeing of Alaskans, but she questioned how legislators could make those decisions with the best available information if legislators never had a chance to learn about tribal governments.

She detailed there are 229 tribal governments in Alaska and those 229 tribal governments have created an incredible Alaska Tribal Health Care System, which she believes all Alaskans probably know of better today than they did before COVID-19. The Tribal Health Care System has exemplified the power of tribal governance and about what can happen when people are in charge of their own destiny, which is essentially the same kind of story Alaskans put forward in their pursuit to become a state.

She said there should not be a tension between tribal and state governments in Alaska. There should be an opportunity for people to understand that "one, plus one, plus one, equals three." Three chances for children in Alaska to know more, to be better citizens, to understand what it means when somebody says they are a tribal citizen and understand where that relationship comes from and how long it has been in Alaska.

She pointed out the federally recognized tribes in Alaska are modern manifestations of the indigenous people in Alaska that long predates the United States and the State of Alaska. That inherent sovereignty that the tribal governments have is not dissimilar—although it is different—from state and federal sovereignty. She asked committee members to imagine the power the children of Alaska will have if they can understand those three concepts, know how to make informed decisions, and build relationships because of it.

MS. MEDICINE CROW remarked Alaska has yet to have that opportunity and has stifled its own development by not previously including [the three concepts]. The legislation is an opportunity to change that and the trajectory of where the state goes. She said she cannot imagine what it would be like to be a child learning about these things, inquiring about these things, learning how to critique these things, understanding responsibility the legislature has to them—it is not just about

the benefits that state citizens receive, it also about the responsibilities.

MS. MEDICINE CROW stated the same applies to the Alaska tribal governments and the federal government. By including Alaska Native tribal governance within the civics education of the public education students, she explained the following:

I believe that we will also make some really big shifts in some of the racial dynamics that have played too long a part and strangled the growth of Alaska, because our history is imbedded in the civics and when you have a better understanding of history, you have a better understanding of your responsibility as a citizen.

She said that is why she wanted to testify today, and to thank Senator Stevens and the cosponsors for SB 72.

[3:57:41 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES thanked Ms. Medicine Crow. She added she personally needs an education in tribal governments and suggested the committee invite her back for a presentation to better understand tribal governments.

She asked her if she would be working with Commissioner Johnson to help the department as they develop the [tribal government] curriculum.

MS. MEDICINE CROW answered yes. She added Alaska Native elders and ancestors have already created cultural standards for Native education so there is a good foundation and framework to build from. FAI is ready to stand behind Commissioner Johnson to create a robust curriculum and assessment that reflects Native people and its tribal governance.

[3:59:02 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES commented that tribal governance is an important area of focus and responsibility for the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committee.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON thanked Ms. Medicine Crow for her inspiring presentation. She concurred with Chair Hughes on the benefit of a tribal governance presentation, hopefully during the current legislative session.

[4:00:08 PM](#)

JENNIFER KNUTSON, Senior Director of Teaching and Learning, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 72. She thanked the previous testifiers because she is excited about what they said. The Anchorage School District (ASD) is happy that civics is a focus of SB 72. ASD has been embedding civics into its social studies and history courses in grades 6-12 in alignment with standards. However, the bill provides an opportunity for the district to work with the State and [Alaska Native] tribal groups to review, strengthen, and focus its curriculum and instruction.

She said she was excited about the discussion on strengthening the understanding of Alaska Native governance. ASD has had an opportunity to develop its Alaska studies curriculum for third grade by partnering with elders and cultural consultants. The recently completed studies provided the students with a rich and highly accurate curriculum that allowed them to learn about the place where they live. The curriculum touched on some of the government pieces via partnering with cultural consultants, a big strength that benefited the district. She stated she is excited about the possibilities from the bill for the ASD civics instruction.

MS. KNUTSON explained students will benefit from a statewide curriculum by ensuring they have the needed skills and knowledge for meaningful participation in public life as strong citizens in today's world. The curriculum will also help districts reflect on what they are doing to potentially strengthen their current social studies and history course.

She referenced the assessment component of the bill and said ASD is pleased with the adjustments, including assessment development in conjunction with the curriculum. The assessment will provide feedback not only for how students are doing and what their skills are, but teachers, districts, and the State will receive feedback about the students' knowledge and skills. The assessment feedback allows for continuous instruction adjustments to ensure students are growing and demonstrating their skills to be successful in life.

MS. KNUTSON said ASD appreciates the student civics test will show up on their transcripts. ASD has a formal assessment for its students who are doing World Languages to obtain a Seal of Biliteracy and that shows up on their transcripts—an attractive recognition to colleges and businesses. ASD thinks that having the civics assessment information on their transcripts will reflect their good citizenship knowledge for application in

their post K-12 education—a similar transcription benefit to the Seal of Biliteracy.

4:04:28 PM

MS. KNUTSON summarized ASD finds a lot of positive aspects with the bill and appreciates the work that has gone into the team that has improved the legislation. ASD looks forward to partnering with the State and [Alaska Native] tribal organizations on the curriculum and assessment components, and ensuring that they are high quality, rigorous, and aligned to the assessment.

CHAIR HUGHES asked if the World Language assessment that appears on student transcripts indicates the score that students received.

MS. KNUTSON answered no. She explained students take the assessment (there is criteria to receive the Seal of Biliteracy, like grade point average) but the transcript indicates the student passed the assessment.

4:05:40 PM

CHAIR HUGHES asked her to confirm that the transcript indicates that the student passed the assessment.

MS. KNUTSON answered yes.

CHAIR HUGHES noted the Senate Education Committee had policy discussions regarding SB 72 and changes were made by the committee, but members knew the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee would hear the bill next to do some further work.

She said she shares the same concerns that Senator Myers expressed, but she wants to work with the bill sponsor. One of her concerns is if the legislature tasks teachers to instruct the students in the civics material, will the curriculum motivate and engage students when they know that it does not matter whether they pass or fail. She suggested requiring the assessment score appear on the transcript so the student knows they would carry the score with them, and they would hopefully want to get a passing score on their transcript.

CHAIR HUGHES explained she knows there are concerns, especially when getting something up and running. The committee does not want high school seniors to initially not graduate because of the assessment. She noted receiving feedback from

superintendents regarding "unfunded mandates." Many districts—including ASD—are already doing civics. Aligning with what DEED might produce assures that a district covers all their bases so students could do well in their assessments.

CHAIR HUGHES raised the question of moving towards a pass/fail assessment and asked Ms. Knutson what she thought about initially including the score on the transcript but with the goal over several years of requiring the student pass to graduate.

4:08:02 PM

MS. KNUTSON recommended focusing first on the curriculum that is engaging and allows students to practice what they have learned—where they are not memorizing everything. The curriculum should allow students to make connections between the different parts of government and what that means to be a citizen. The assessment should align to the curriculum for measuring what the district is teaching the students. Having a score on a transcript is not necessarily going to be a motivating factor for how well a student does or how much they know civics.

CHAIR HUGHES noted an assessment actually can include a portfolio that shows activities and engagement, perhaps a student showing up at a city council meeting.

She said she is "kind of shocked" that Ms. Knutson would say that a student's grade might not motivate them. Students are motivated to get good grades—some students are not—but most students do not want to fail their course work and recording a score would motivate them.

CHAIR HUGHES asked Ms. Knutson if she is sure that she wants to stick to her statement that posting a score would not motivate students.

4:10:08 PM

MS. KNUTSON agreed that there are a lot of students who are intrinsically motivated by having good grades and seeing that on their transcripts. However, she would like to see assessments linked to the instruction so that students see the outcome of what they are learning.

She said she appreciates what Chair Hughes said about having different means of assessing students where they are able to demonstrate that they are learning as opposed to a fill-in-the-blank assessment.

CHAIR HUGHES asked Senator Stevens if he had any comments as the bill sponsor.

SENATOR STEVENS stated he appreciates the testimony from the three individuals. He noted Ms. Medicine Crow used the word "responsibility," a word he will say in the future because he thinks it is the responsibility being a citizen to know what is going on, to vote, and to participate.

He noted he stated earlier that there are a lot of good teachers out there and a lot of school districts are doing a great job, but not everyone is, and some are not doing it at all. He remarked that starting the instruction must be with good curriculum.

He added that one thing not addressed is the requirement for DEED to provide an annual report to the House and Senate education committees, so the legislature knows what is going on. He said in time the legislature might want to make more restrictions—like posting the score—but he is not sure posting a score is the right way to start.

SENATOR STEVENS remarked that a lot of citizens are not motivated and a lot could not pass the immigration test, but passing a test is not required if anybody wants to vote. The [proposed civics instruction] begins an improvement of students in Alaska to help them become more knowledgeable; that report is very important and having that on the transcript is important as well.

[4:12:52 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES asked the sponsor if there was a list of school districts that are or are not offering [civics], and at what grade level. She noted someone shared that in her community the Alaska Native Studies instruction occurs in the freshman year, but government civics is as a senior where taking an assessment might be a problem due to the four-year difference.

SENATOR STEVENS replied there is not a lot of consistency across the state and the legislation might bring some consistency to the [civics instruction].

He asked Mr. Lamkin to comment on what the school districts are doing.

[4:13:54 PM](#)



MR. LAMKIN noted he was alerted to the question and during the last 24 hours he has carefully reviewed the websites for all 54 school districts. He said at this time he has not been able to drill deeply, but at the surface there are three districts that specifically reference "civics," "Inupiaq Studies" in Northwest Arctic, or "Native History" in the Yukon-Koyukuk School District.

He detailed there is a lot of civics-type activity out there, typically referenced as "social studies" which includes United States history, world history, United States government, current events, economics, and the statutory requirement of a half a credit for a semester in Alaska studies. That data is out there, but there is quite a diverse and colorful variety of the districts' approaches to that—a part of local control—but there is no clearinghouse or central location to receive the curriculum or certainly—to his knowledge—not an assessment that is on civics or government in order to graduate.

MR. LAMKIN noted there are end-of-course exams that would contribute to a grade. With Alaska studies, there is the simple fact that they have to take the exams.

[4:15:25 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES thanked him for his time and effort to try to tease out the information. She asked if he gets further information and drills down any further to let the committee know when the committee brings the bill back up.

She asked if some of the districts require the courses for graduation.

MR. LAMKIN answered that state law requires each district requires students to complete three years of social studies. Students may choose between subjects such as United States history, United States government, current events, and world history but they must take half credit in Alaska studies.

[4:16:24 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES recognized that Senator Wilson had joined the committee meeting.

She said because the committee did not focus on the tribal government piece in the [Senate Education Committee], the committee will address tribal government. She suggested offline or committee meeting discussions with rural superintendents to

provide input, an important part the committee should not neglect.

[4:17:04 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES held SB 72 in committee.

#

**SB 17-ENERGY EFFICIENCY & POLICY: PUB. BLDGS**

[4:17:18 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 17, "An Act relating to the retrofitting of certain public facilities and community facilities; relating to the performance of energy audits on schools and community facilities; relating to the duties of the Alaska Energy Authority and the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation; creating a rapid economic recovery office in the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority; and relating to the state energy policy and energy source reporting by state agencies."

She noted this was the second hearing and there was a committee substitute (CS) for the committee to consider.

[4:17:37 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS moved to adopt the CS for SB 17, work order 32-LS0187\B, as the working document.

[4:17:52 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES objected for discussion purposes.

[4:18:05 PM](#)

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 17, said Connor Owens will present the CS.

[4:18:32 PM](#)

CONNOR OWENS, Intern, Senator Tom Begich, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, paraphrased the summary of changes from version A to version B. He stated the following:

**Page 2, Lines 20-23:**

This change clarifies that the energy audits the State will perform under this legislation aren't going to be large investment-grade audits. Instead, the audits are meant to be minimal, level-one [American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers] (ASHRAE) audits that can be performed either in person or virtually. The idea is that these more minimal

audits will reduce the fiscal notes of this bill but still allow the State to determine if there are potential projects for energy savings.

SENATOR BEGICH explained this change was a specific request from testifiers for a preliminary [Reporting and Planning System] (RAPS) virtual or another audit. The companies would do the real intensive audits once a need was determined.

[4:19:37 PM](#)

MR. OWENS continued:

**Page 4, line 13:**

Clarifies the new office being established, the Rapid Economic Recovery Office, is meant to use its expertise to support and contract for these bundled projects so that facilities don't have to navigate the retrofitting process on their own. This will be especially helpful for facilities with lower numbers of employees and rural facilities. So this just makes it clear that the new office is there to leverage its expertise to help communities and facilities with these projects.

**Page 4, lines 17-26:**

This change aligns terminology with existing statute. It replaces "clean energy" with the definition of "renewable energy." This is meant so that we do not have to create a new definition for what energy sources the bill addresses and allows us to stay consistent with previous state statute.

SENATOR BEGICH noted he had inadvertently transferred language from the Lower 48 to the bill and admitted he should have checked the statutes to see what the definitions were.

[4:21:52 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS stated he understands the idea behind the bill that spending a little money now saves more money later. He said what he is concerned about is the diminishing returns. For example, retrofitting a 50-year-old building with the expectation for quite a bit of savings, but retrofitting a 5-year-old building is another thing.

He explained what he is concerned about is some of the language in the bill regarding the number of buildings and the dollar figure. He noted the previous presentation addressed the number

of retrofits and the annual dollar savings. However, his concern is the possibility for spending more and getting less.

SENATOR MYERS asked what he expects to be the end result.

4:23:05 PM

SENATOR BEGICH replied he brought up the perfect question. He noted there were two issues that came up in the previous hearing for the bill, one was a suggestion from a testifier to address 50 percent of the buildings that are 5000 square foot or greater as opposed to a 25 percent. Part of the reason why he rejected the suggestion is because the number needs to be at a lower percentage precisely because of diminishing returns for the reason of not wanting to over extend the State in any regard. However, the second thing—and more importantly—that is why the program is a public-private partnership in the bill.

He detailed the way [Energy Service Companies] (ESCOs) work is you have to have a saleable product, so the initial work of the virtual audit—or the audit that was described by Mr. Owens—allows for taking a look at the structures to first see if they are even relevant in terms of a retrofit or a quality-grade investment. The second step after retrofitting determination is to bundle that to see if there is private entity interest; that is the whole point, no private company is going to invest in something with diminishing returns.

SENATOR BEGICH explained the guarantee in the bill is that half of the [energy savings], 25 percent of the overall bill, would be for the reduction of energy prices—which is where you would get to that \$40 million savings mark over time—and 25 percent would go to covering the initial loan. The [Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority] (AIDEA) only serves as a vehicle in a sense for managing the loan. The whole process protects the State from exactly what Senator Myers addressed. The State would not find itself in a situation where the investment is not attractive for a return and guaranteed savings for loan development.

SENATOR BEGICH noted Mr. Hodgkin may provide more detail. He said Mr. Hodgkin has been actively involved in how the State did the ESCOs via the bill in 2010. The State has realized—roughly over a decade—\$40 million in energy cost savings. The real key is private entities are not going to invest in a product that does not give them a return and the State is guaranteed a return as part of that process. The bill only targets 25 percent of those buildings that are 5000 square feet or greater.

CHAIR HUGHES asked Mr. Hodgkin to provide his prospective.

[4:26:05 PM](#)

CHRISTOPHER HODGIN, Engineer and Architect, Division of Facility Services, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Anchorage, Alaska, asked Senator Myers to confirm that his question pertains to the age and quantities of buildings, and program effectiveness on relatively new buildings versus older buildings.

SENATOR MYERS answered yes.

MR. HODGIN noted one of the interesting things the department has seen when retrofitting older and newer buildings over the last decade is that building technology is getting more complex and that results in desynchronization where new pieces of technology are not optimized. The department has seen some significant opportunity to improve complex systems in newer buildings.

[4:28:00 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES removed her objection to the CS. Finding no further objection, version B was before the committee.

[4:28:15 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES opened public testimony on SB 17. Finding none, she closed public testimony.

[4:29:14 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES held SB 17 in committee.

[4:29:54 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Hughes adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:29 p.m.